

# Responding to children with a disability in homework clubs

## Tip sheet for homework club tutors

### About disability

In an Out-of-school-hours Learning Support Program you will be working with children with a variety of needs and abilities. Every child is unique. Part of your role is to be flexible and adapt how you work to meet the diverse needs of the children attending your program.

### What is a disability?

Some of the children attending a Learning Support Program may have a disability. A disability is an ongoing condition that makes it more difficult for someone to do everyday activities. It is caused by impairment to a part of the body, for instance, legs, eyes or brain. Around 7% of children in Australia are living with a disability. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009 census) Having a disability does not mean someone is sick. They may just need some additional support in various life areas including moving, speaking, learning and socialising.

### Disability rights

People with a disability have the same rights as anyone else. They have the right to be included in society and to participate in all aspects of community life. There are laws such as the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (1992) to protect these rights. The Commonwealth Disability Standards for Education (2005) outline what schools must do to ensure that children with a disability can participate equally and receive a quality education. Schools must make 'reasonable adjustments' to meet the child's needs. This might mean adapting teaching approaches, adjusting the curriculum requirements, changing how the classroom is set up, or using different ways of communicating.

### Support at school

Children with disability may require additional support services to enable them to participate equally at school. Specialist teachers, education support workers and therapists (occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech pathologists and psychologists) together with the child's family may be part of the Student Support Group. The Student Support Group meets regularly to plan how to meet the child's additional learning and support needs in the best way possible. Learning Support Programs can play an important role in helping children with disabilities not only with their schoolwork, but also with participation and social inclusion.

### Types of disability

The following is a list of some common disabilities and conditions affecting children. Some children may have more than one disability



Intellectual disability	Someone who has an intellectual disability will experience delay in their development, and will need more time and practice to learn new things. They may need assistance with their daily living activities. Down Syndrome is the commonest known cause of intellectual disability in Australia.
Physical disability	This affects a person’s ability to move. There are many causes of physical disability including spinal injury and motor neurone disease (MND). One common physical disability in children is cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy affects people in a variety of ways, including movement, posture, muscle control and coordination, muscle tone, reflexes and balance. It may take longer for someone with cerebral palsy to process information and to communicate- but it is important to know that many children with cerebral palsy do NOT have an intellectual disability. Some children with a physical disability may need assistance with personal care tasks such as eating and going to the toilet.
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Autism is a condition that affects a person's ability to engage with the world around them. A child with ASD may have problems communicating and socialising with others. They may react in unusual ways to what they sense. They may also show repetitive patterns of behaviour and a narrow range of interests. Structure and routine can be helpful for children with ASD.
Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD)	A child with AD/HD may find it difficult to pay attention and to complete a task. Children with problems in the area of hyperactivity may talk a lot and have trouble staying still.
Specific learning disability (SLD)	Children with SLD have ongoing difficulties with learning skills such as reading, writing, spelling and maths. They often manage well in other areas of their life. Dyslexia is an example of an SLD.
Communication disabilities	Many types of disabilities can lead to difficulties with communication. Children with speech disorders may use a variety of communication methods, including signs, picture systems, and computer or tablet-based devices.
Sensory disabilities	Children may have vision loss or hearing difficulties. There are many resources and special devices available to help children with sensory loss.
Other conditions	Some children have conditions not classed as disabilities but which can affect their physical, social and emotional health.
Complex medical needs	Some children have diseases and illnesses such as cystic fibrosis or childhood cancers. They might need help with medications and medical equipment such as oxygen and tube feeding.
Mental illness	Anxiety and depression are examples of mental illnesses that can affect children.



## How you can help

It is useful to know about the types of disability – but remember every child is unique. Two children with the same disability can have very different abilities, likes, dislikes and support needs. It is important to see the child first, as an individual - not just their disability. Be positive. Always focus on the strengths and abilities of the child. Any disability can affect a child's learning. Here are some things to be aware of:

### 'Invisible' disabilities

Some people's disabilities are 'visible', for instance, a child with a physical disability who uses a wheelchair. In this situation we can see that making school or OSHLSP buildings physically accessible with ramps or lifts will support this child to meet their educational needs.

However, some other disabilities are 'invisible'. A child who has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can find it difficult to concentrate in a busy, noisy environment. It is important to realise this is part of their disability, they are not being deliberately 'naughty' or unhelpful. Maybe a change of approach or environment will help them attend to their homework task more easily. It is just as important to make these adjustments as it is to install a ramp for a child using a wheelchair.

### Adapting activities to meet different learning needs

Talk to the child about what works for them. If possible, liaise with the school and family to find out about their personalised learning support plan and behaviour support plan, if relevant. Always check with the child and give the benefit of the doubt if you are unsure if they have understood.

Children with an intellectual disability or ASD may require more structure in their activities so that they can work independently. New skills may need to be broken down into smaller steps than for other learners and more repetition is needed. Visual cues such as timetables can help.

For a child with ASD, find out what their interests are and tailor some activities for them around this. Have some comforting sensory activities on hand for when they are feeling upset or frustrated. It can be helpful to have the same volunteer working with them each week.

*“Be patient! Understand that in some sessions they might not want to do what you have planned. That is okay; just try to find something else they can be engaged with. It might be drawing, playing lego etc.”*  
(Louise Villanti Team Leader African Reading Club)

Activities may need to be adapted so a child with a physical disability can succeed. For instance, use a balloon in a catching game rather than a small ball that is harder to catch.

Be aware that someone who is living with a disability is often using a lot of extra energy just to get through the day. Fatigue may affect their ability to concentrate, so keep sessions short and allow time for breaks.

### Assistive devices

Some children with disabilities will have special equipment that they use to help them to perform their everyday activities. Everyone working with the child needs to know about the equipment they use. Make sure that it is available at all times and is in good working order.

### Children with disabilities and cultural diversity

Be aware that disability is viewed in different ways across cultures. Families' understanding of their child's disability may vary. Particularly where there are language barriers, knowledge of services and supports may



be limited. Interpreters and Multicultural Education Aides can help. Communication between school, Learning Support Program, family and support services is essential.

### **Behavioural issues**

Sometimes a child with a disability can have unusual behaviours that impact on their ability to learn and sometimes affect others around them. We need to be aware that all behaviour is a form of communication. Maybe the child is not happy with something and staff and volunteers need to think about why the behaviour is happening rather than just 'managing' the behaviour. It is important that there is a consistent and positive approach to addressing issues, in conjunction with the child and their support team.

### **Children with disabilities and child safety**

All children, including children with a disability, may be at risk of abuse. It is therefore very important that all staff and volunteers respect the rights of children with disability, as they would for any child, have appropriate policies and processes in place to ensure safety and stay alert for signs of possible safety concerns.

### **Think about inclusion**

- When you are planning an active game, is it set up so that a child who uses a wheelchair can participate?
- When giving instructions to a small group, do you use simple English and give visual cues, so a child with an intellectual disability can understand and join in equally?
- If you are working with a child who finds noise and large groups distracting, do you find a quiet place so they can concentrate more easily and achieve success in their work?
- If you are having particular issues with a child, do you communicate with the child and their support team (family and staff) to solve the problem?
- Are you supporting children with a disability to be as independent as possible?
- Are the activities you use age-appropriate?

There are many different ways to complete a task.

- Can you adapt a literacy activity for a child who has difficulty writing?
- Do they need to use a communication device?
- Instead of writing a paragraph on a topic, can they write key words, add a drawing or find relevant pictures on the computer?



## For more information

Association for children with a disability

<http://acd.org.au/>

Educational resources for children with autism

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/autism.aspx>

Amaze- Autism Spectrum Disorders information and services

<http://www.amaze.org.au/uploads/2016/04/Amaze-Info-Sheet-Teaching-a-Student-on-the-Spectrum-June-2015.pdf>

Scope- disability services and information

<http://www.scopevic.org.au/>

Vision Australia

<https://www.visionaustralia.org/living-with-low-vision/children>

Yooralla

<http://www.yooralla.com.au/>

Down Syndrome Victoria

[www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au](http://www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au)

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